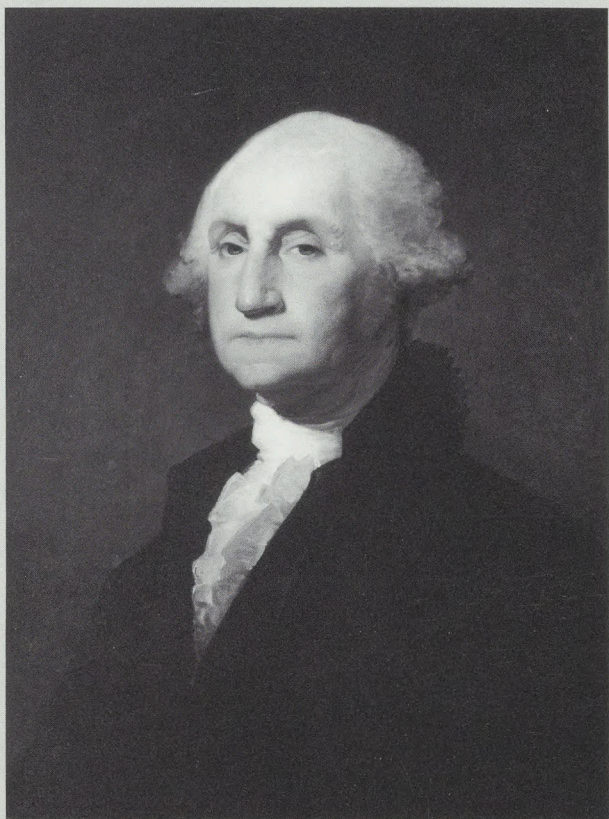


# Artists of the Federal City



A Washington, D.C. Bicentennial Tribute  
Selections from the Permanent Collection  
of the Corcoran Gallery of Art

## A Self-Guide

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This brochure in conjunction with the Archives' exhibition **A Tribute to the Nineteenth Century Fine Arts Community of Washington, D.C.**  
July 6 - December 29, 1991

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# Artist in the Federal City

## Foreword

1991 marks the formal celebration of Washington, D.C.'s 200th anniversary. As a tribute to our city's heritage, the Corcoran is offering a self-guided tour and an Archives exhibit focusing on the development of Washington's nineteenth-century fine arts community.

This flyer highlights selected artists and their works of art, marked with a symbol (★) corresponding to a number and text in this pamphlet. Each painting is marked with a symbol corresponding to a number and text in this pamphlet, works can be located on the accompanying floorplan. The works included are by significant American artists who lived, practiced, taught, and exhibited frequently in the Washington area from 1800 to about 1910.

## William Wilson Corcoran and the Corcoran Gallery of Art

The Corcoran Gallery was founded in 1869 by Washington banker and philanthropist, William Wilson Corcoran. At a time when most nineteenth-century art collectors were chiefly concerned with acquiring European art, Mr. Corcoran believed in the "American genius" and, thus, collected primarily American art. He allowed visitors to view his art collection at his home at 15th and H Streets. This arrangement, however, did not fully satisfy his goals, and as early as 1855 he began planning construction of a museum building at 17th street and Pennsylvania avenue (now the Renwick Gallery) to house his collection. Mr. Corcoran believed that the residents of Washington deserved exposure to the arts and

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intended his museum to serve as a national gallery. In 1869, he deeded the museum and most of his personal art collection to a Board of Trustees, thus ensuring the institution's survival beyond his lifetime. Mr. Corcoran and his gift have enriched the heritage of this nation, particularly Washington, D.C., through his unique patronage and encouragement of the national and regional art community.

### **Artists of the Federal City**

Soon after the establishment of the District of Columbia as the nation's capital in 1790-91, artists began traveling to the city in search of government commissions and private patronage. Even before the federal city was formally established, itinerant artists spent time in Georgetown and Alexandria, Virginia. Both cities were active shipping ports with a prosperous merchant class. In the early years of the District, most artists survived on portrait commissions from government figures and wealthy citizens. By the 1820s, federal interest in the arts had begun. Commissions were awarded for portraits documenting westward expansion and the native Americans, and for the decoration of federal buildings. It was somewhat more difficult, however, for Washington artists as they did not find the patronage of the larger cities of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, nor the government support of the European cities. Despite the lack of steady federal support, artists continued to visit Washington throughout the nineteenth century, either making the District their home or exhibiting their work.

The membership activities and exhibition histories of regional nineteenth-century arts clubs and associations indicate that the fine arts com-

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munity in Washington, D.C. was organized by 1853, and had begun to exhibit regularly. The earliest known organization was the Metropolitan Mechanics Institute, founded that year. The Institute's three annual exhibitions included the fine arts, the decorative arts, and crafts. The Washington Art Association, founded in 1865, was the first organization devoted exclusively to the promotion and exhibition of the fine arts. Members included local art patrons, such as William Wilson Corcoran and George Riggs, as well as regional and national artists. American artists, ever hopeful for government patronage, considered Washington, the nation's capital, an important city in which to exhibit. The constitution and by-laws of the Association suggest that the Association actively encouraged and promoted American artists -- both in Washington and nationally. Artists such as Asher B. Durand, Charles Bird King, William Brenton Boggs, John Mix Stanley, and Eastman Johnson were but a few of the well-known exhibitors and members of the Washington Art Association.

By the mid-1800s, the District represented an encouraging market for artists. Several prominent collectors of American art resided here. Moreover, with the opening of the Corcoran Gallery in 1869, an important exhibition venue and opportunity for sales became available. Because the federal government had not yet established a national art museum, the fine arts community viewed the Corcoran as a national gallery. Artists desired representation in the Corcoran, either through the sale of their work, or through temporary exhibitions.

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## The Artists

**1.** Charles Peale Polk, 1767-1822. *Thomas Corcoran and Hannah Lemmon Corcoran*, c.

1802-1810. Charles Peale Polk, a nephew of Charles Wilson Peale, settled in the District in 1802, where he remained as a government clerk until he moved to Richmond County, Virginia, around 1820. During these years, he completed portraits of the area's wealthy citizens, including these two Georgetown residents, William Wilson Corcoran's parents.

**2.** Frederick Kemmelmeyer, active 1788-1816. *Charlotte Marsteller*, c.

1803. Research has documented Kemmelmeyer's activities in the Baltimore, Washington, and Northern Virginia area. In 1803, he advertised his services as a portrait painter in

Alexandria. Charlotte Marsteller was probably painted there, although the exact location depicted has not been determined.

**3.** Joshua Johnson, active 1796-1820s. *Mrs. Hugh McCurdy and her Daughters*, c. 1804. This example by one of the earliest identified





African-American artists depicts the family of a successful Baltimore merchant. Johnson is commonly associated with Baltimore, based on his advertisements placed in the local newspaper and entries in the city directories. It is likely that Johnson also completed portraits in the Washington, D.C. area. Re-

search has determined that he traveled in the region surrounding the District. Not all of Johnson's sitters have been identified, and research on his career continues.



**4.** Gilbert Stuart, 1755-1828.

*George Washington*, 1796. Stuart painted the original of this George Washington portrait in Philadelphia, but later established a studio on Pennsylvania Avenue from

1803 to 1805. Here he completed portraits of residents Thomas Jefferson, William Thornton, and James and Dolly Madison.

**5.** Pietro Bonanni, 1789-1821. *Jane Cocking Glover*, 1818. Pietro Bonanni immigrated to Washington from Italy in 1817 to work as a

decorative painter in the capitol. He painted the ceiling of the old House of Representatives in a trompe l'oeil design of coffers and moldings. The dome has since been built of wood in the same coffering design, and the only surviving visual record of Bonanni's decorative work is depicted in Samuel F.B. Morse's painting, *The Old House of Representatives* (see #7). Bonanni also established a painting school here in 1818 and executed several portraits. Jane Cocking Glover, the sitter for this portrait, was an ancestor of Charles C. Glover, former Corcoran Gallery trustee and president of Riggs Bank.



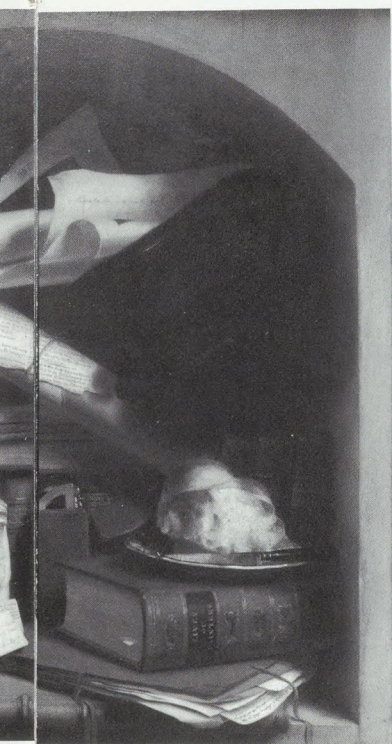
**6.** Charles Bird King, 1785-1862.

*Poor Artist's Cupboard*, c. 1815 and *Henry Clay*, 1821. Charles Bird King resided in the District from 1819 until his death in 1862. He had studied in London under Benjamin West and lived in Boston and Philadelphia before settling in Washington. *Poor Artist's Cupboard* was painted in Philadelphia and suggests the difficulties facing American artists of this period. Bird painted many American Indian portraits for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, most of which burned in 1865 at a fire in the Smithsonian Institution.



Throughout his career, King exerted a strong influence on the Washington art community. He established a studio and gallery at his home on 12th and F Streets, where he showed his work and that of local and traveling artists such as Thomas Sully and George Cooke. He

also advised and taught several local artists, including John Gadsby Chapman, George Cooke, and John Cranch. Bird lived to witness the founding of two local arts associations -- the Metropolitan Mechanics Club, founded in 1853, and the Washington Art Association, of which he was a founding member in 1856.



**7.** Samuel F.B. Morse, 1791-

1872. *The Old House of Representatives*, 1822.

Morse completed this massive work in Washington and then spent one year trying to sell it. Eight-six individual portraits were completed for the painting. On the left is Joseph Gales, editor and publisher of the District's earliest newspaper, *The National Intelligencer*. Unfortunately, the government did not purchase the painting and a disillusioned Morse left Washington and gave up his artistic endeavors. He pursued a career in the

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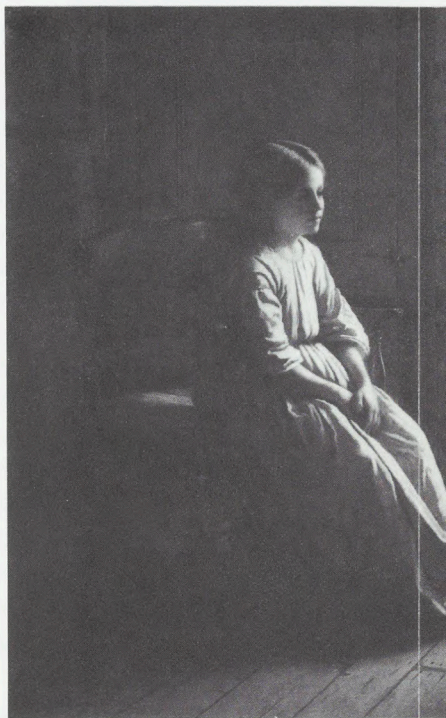
sciences, however, and is best remembered for the signal code which bears his name and his work on the telegraph.

8. Emanuel Leutze, 1816-1868. *The Amazon and her Children*, 1851. Emanuel Leutze, born

in Germany, immigrated with his family to Philadelphia. His skills as a painter were highly regarded and earned him a national reputation. His famous *Washington Crossing the Delaware* was exhibited at the Capitol in 1852, and received favorable reviews. In anticipation

of government patronage, Leutze moved to Washington in 1859 and received a commission one year later to paint a mural for one of the stairwells in the House of Representatives. Completed in 1862, the monumental work, *Westward the Course of the Empire Takes Its Way* or *Westward Ho!*, depicts the 19th century's romance with western expansion.

Curiously, Leutze did not join the ranks of local artists in the Washington Art Association. He was made an honorary member for the two years he spent abroad, but his mem-





bership was dropped upon his return. His art was, however, well represented in each of the Association's four annual exhibitions, having been submitted by Washington collectors George Riggs and William Wilson Corcoran, who bought this painting for his personal collection.



9. Seth Eastman, 1808-1875. *Lacrosse Playing Among the Sioux Indians*, 1851. Seth Eastman's career in the military took him to the remote western territories during the 1840s. A careful observer, he recorded the lives of the American Indians. In

1849, he was transferred to Washington and one year later he was assigned to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to illustrate the six volume, *Indian Tribes of the United States*. Later, in 1867, Eastman was again commissioned by the House Committees on Indian Affairs and Military Affairs to paint scenes of American Indian life. As a resident painter of Washington, Eastman was a member of the Washington Art Association and exhibited several of his paintings in the Association's 1857 Second Annual Exhibition.

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**10** John Mix Stanley, 1814-1872. *The Disputed Shot*, 1858. Much like Seth Eastman, John Mix Stanley spent the early part of his career painting American Indian tribes, completing well over 150 paintings. In 1852, he moved to Washington and spent the next thirteen years unsuccessfully trying to convince Congress to purchase his "Indian Gallery". He temporarily deposited the paintings in the Smithsonian Institution, with the earlier American Indian



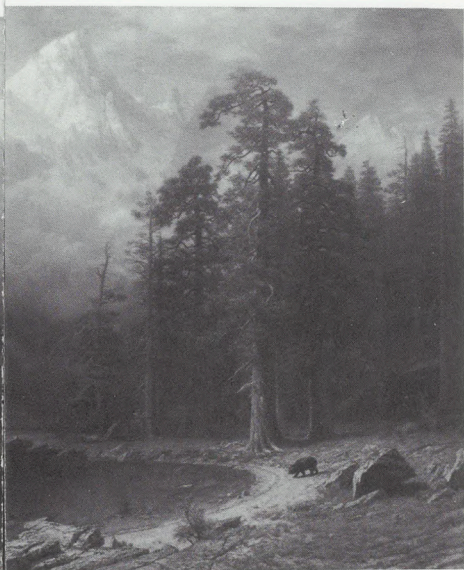
paintings by Charles Bird King. A fire in 1865 destroyed all but five of Stanley's paintings and almost all of King's. During his career in Washington, Stanley painted many memorable American Indian, landscape, and genre paintings. *The Disputed Shot* is one of the finest genre pieces from his Washington residency. An active member of the Washington Art Association, Stanley served as Treasurer in 1859 and 1860 and exhibited in the 1857 and 1860 Annual Exhibitions.

**11** Eastman Johnson, 1824-1906. *Girl and Pets*, 1859. Although Eastman Johnson lived chiefly in New York, he was a

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Washington resident for almost fifteen years. Here he completed some of his most powerful work, including this painting and the famous genre painting, *Old Kentucky Home, Life in the South*, which depicts local blacks near the Johnson home on F Street. An American painter of major standing, Johnson studied in



Germany under Emanuel Leutze and was, no doubt, influenced by his associations with the many talented artists residing in Washington in the 1850s.

Johnson

became a member of the Washington Art Association, serving on its Board of Directors in 1857 and exhibiting *Girl and Pets* in the Association's First Annual Exhibition that same year.

**12** Albert Bierstadt, 1820-1902. *Mount Corcoran*, 1875-1877. Albert Bierstadt enjoyed great success as a painter of scenes of the American West. Throughout most of his career, he travelled across the United States and abroad, painting, exhibiting, and promoting his work. Recognizing William Wilson Corcoran's patronage of American artists, Bierstadt often exhibited in Washington. In

the 1859 Third Annual Exhibition of the Washington Art Association, he entered two works, *Lake Lucerne* and *Autumn Westphalia*, European landscapes. Soon after the Corcoran Gallery opened in 1869, Bierstadt wrote to one of the trustees expressing his desire to sell a piece to the Gallery. For several years following, he pursued this objective, wanting his work to be part of a national collection that included American artists such as Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, and Emanuel Leutze. In an 1869 let-

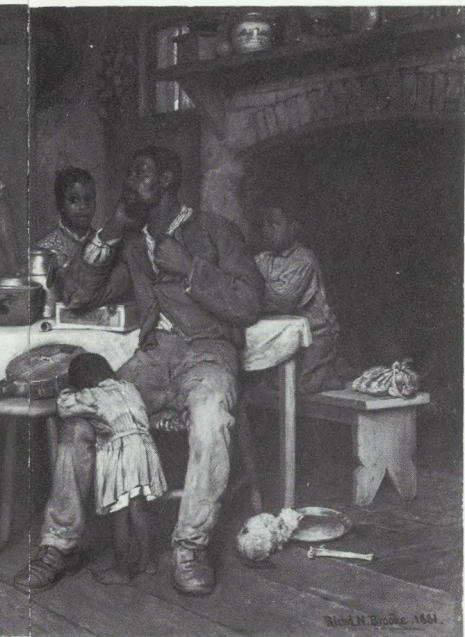


ter to Curator William MacLeod, Bierstadt states, "...I would like to be well represented in that gallery." He found success by selling *Mount Corcoran* directly to William Wilson Corcoran, rather than to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Corcoran then advised the Trustees that the painting was of merit, and sold it to the Gallery.

**13** Asher B. Durand, 1796-1886. *Edge of the Forest*, 1871. One of the founders of the Hudson River School of landscape painting, Asher B. Durand is not usually associated



with Washington. An active artist, however, Durand traveled throughout the country promoting and exhibiting his work and, thus, became an honorary member of the Washington Art Association. He entered several of his paintings in the Association's first two Annual Exhibitions in 1857.



## 14 Richard Norris

Brooke,  
1847-1920.  
*A Pastoral Visit*, 1881.  
Brooke studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and taught at private studio schools in Philadelphia before leaving to

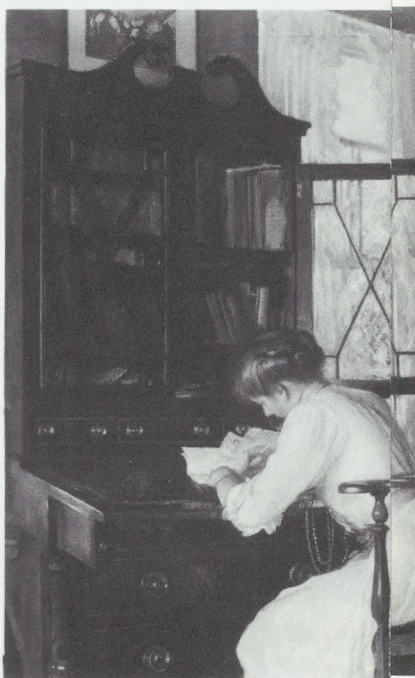
study in Paris. In 1879, he returned to the States and settled in Washington, where he became Vice President of the Washington Art Club (founded in 1877). After the demise of the Art Club, Brooke and other Washington artists formed the Art Students League of Washington and offered a range of studio classes to area artists. Brooke was also an exhibiting member of the Society of Washington Artists, founded in 1891. In 1902, he became Vice-Principal of the Corcoran School of Art. Two examples of Brooke's genre work, *A Pastoral Visit*, and *A Dog Swap*,

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were completed in 1881 and depict romanticized views of black Americans. After 1881, Brooke devoted himself to landscape painting and was one of the founders of what is known today as the "Washington Landscape School" which included Max Weyl, William Henry Holmes, Edmund Messer, and James Henry Moser.

**15** Edmund Tarbell, 1862-1938. *Josephine and Mercie*, 1908. Edmund Tarbell spent most of his career in Boston, where he taught and was a member of the National Academy. Tarbell, an American Impressionist, is best remembered for his association with the group

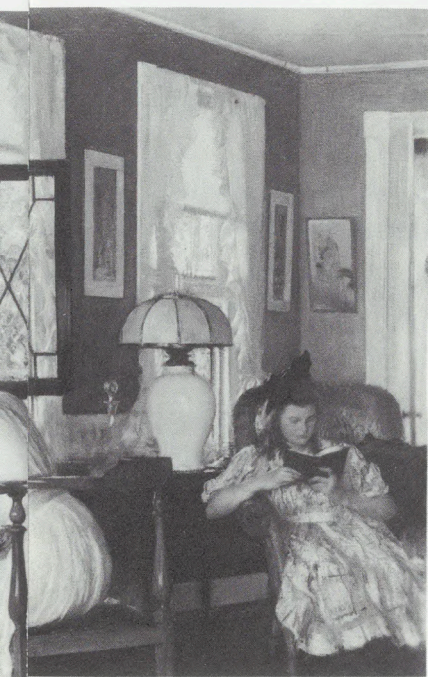
of artists known as "The Ten," which included William M. Chase, Frank Benson, Joseph DeCamp, and Childe Hassam. He left Boston in 1918 to take the position of Principal of the Corcoran School of Art, where he remained until 1926 molding the artistic direction of the





School and its students. Tarbell brought national recognition to the Corcoran School of Art and established a tradition of hiring faculty members of national importance. Tarbell often exhibited his work in Washington, participating in the Corcoran's nationally-based biennial exhibition series of "Oil Paintings by Contemporary Artists", as well as a number of

group and one-person shows held at the Corcoran. Although not a member of the Society of Washington Artists, he exhibited in the Society's 1918 Annual Exhibition.



On view in the Membership Lounge, off the Atrium is a select group of watercolors by members

of the Society of Washington Artists, founded in 1891, and the Washington Water Color Club, founded in 1896. Included are works by Dora Murdoch, James Henry Moser, Edgar Nye, Marietta Minnegerode, Mary G. Riley, and Matilde Leisenring.

## Photo Captions

(in order of appearance in this publication)

Gilbert Stuart, 1755-1828. *George Washington*, 1796, oil on canvas, 29 1/4 x 24 inches, Bequest of Mrs. Benjamin Ogle Tayloe

Pietro Bonnani, 1789-1821, *Jane Cocking Glover*, 1821, oil on canvas, 29 3/4 x 24 3/4 inches, gift of Mrs. Nancy E. Symington and Mr. Charles C. Glover.

Charles Bird King, 1785-1862, *Poor Artist's Cupboard*, c. 1815, oil on panel, 29 3/4 x 27 3/4 inches, museum purchase and exchange.

Eastman Johnson, 1824-1906. *Girl and Pets*, 1859, oil on canvas, 25 x 28 3/4 inches, gift of William Wilson Corcoran

Albert Bierstadt, 1820-1902. *Mount Corcoran*, 1875-1877, oil on canvas, 61 x 96 1/4 inches, museum purchase.

Richard Norris Brooke, 1847-1920. *A Pastoral Visit*, 1881, oil on canvas, 47 3/4 x 65 3/4 inches, museum purchase.

Edmund Tarbell, 1862-1938. *Josephine and Mercie*, 1908, oil on canvas, 28 1/4 x 32 1/4 inches, museum purchase.

## Sources:

Archives, the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Catalogs; correspondence files; vertical files.

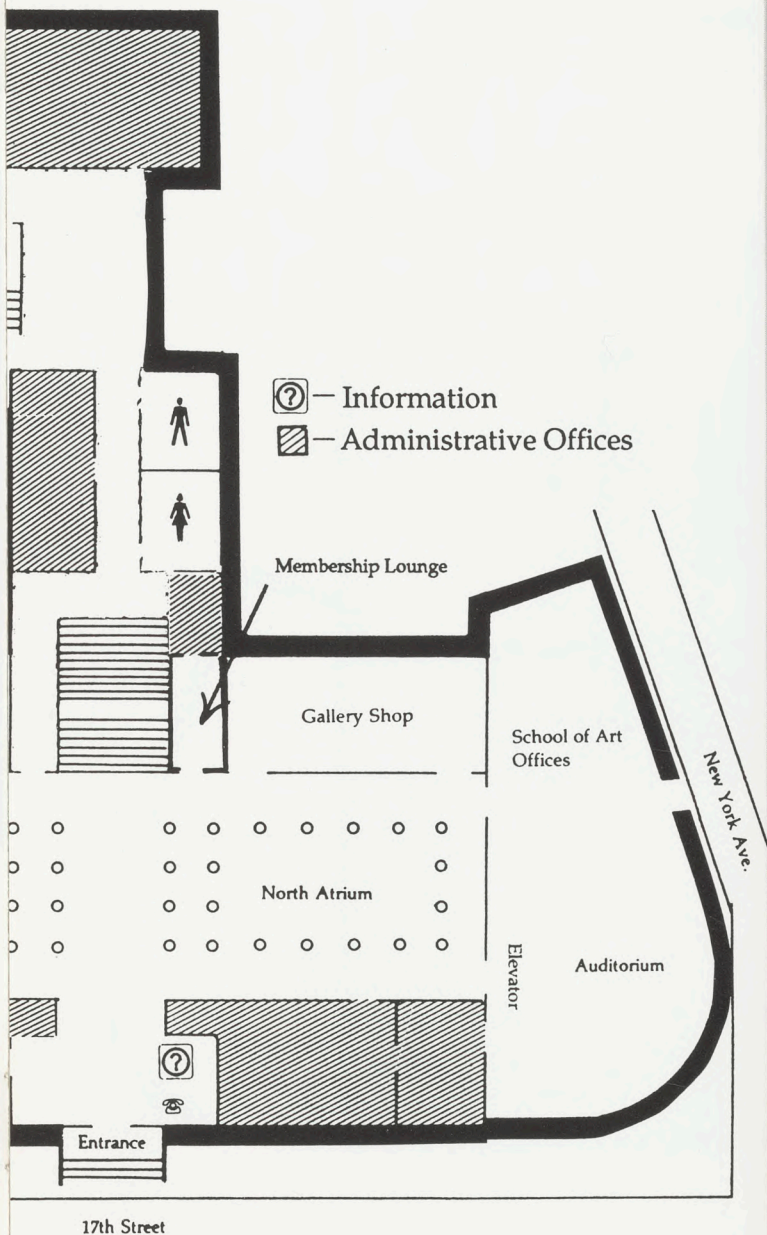
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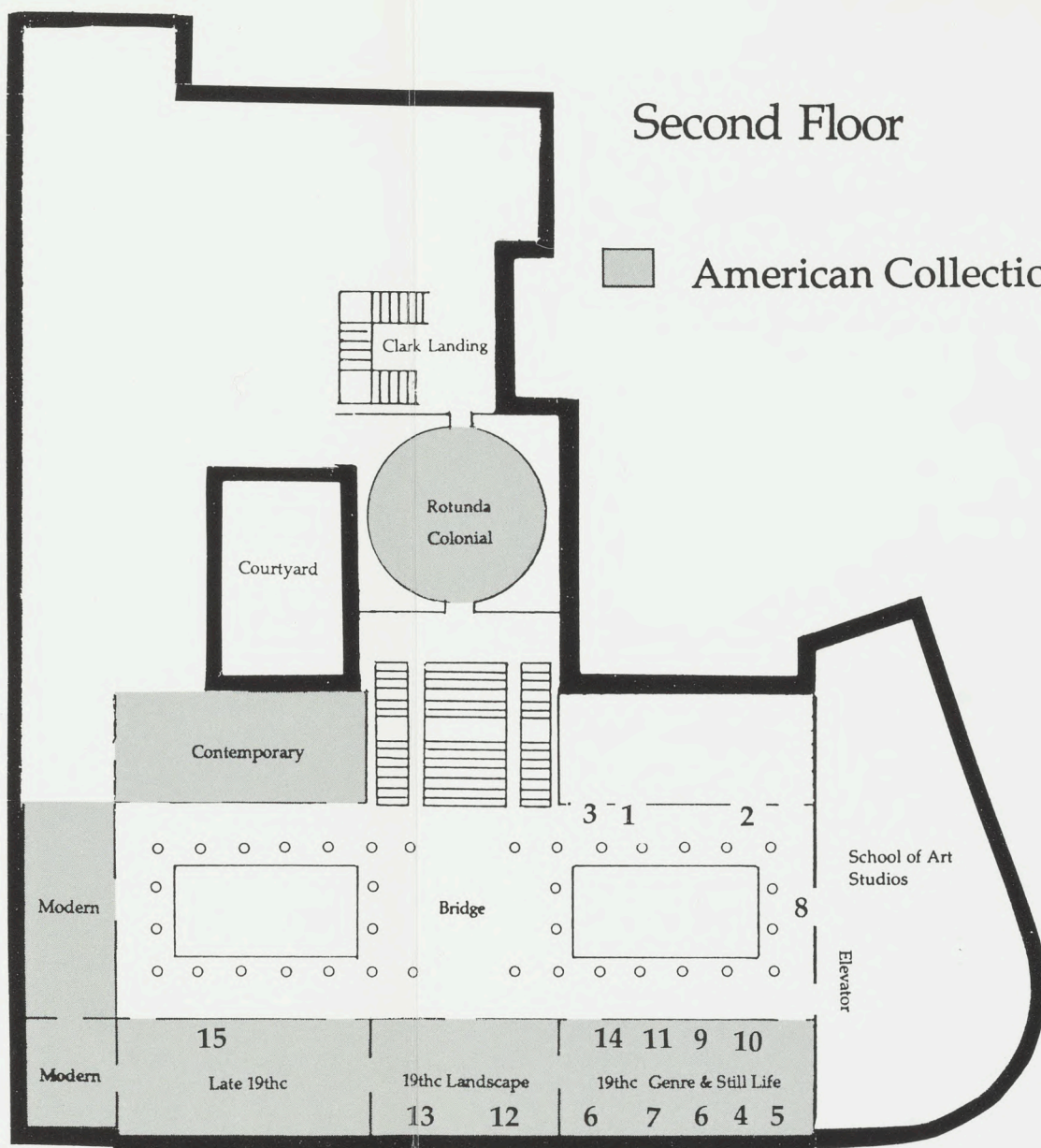


# First Floor



## Second Floor

☐ American Collection





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